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## Shōmu Tennō and the Deity from Kyushu: Hachiman's Initial Rise to Prominence

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In 749, a hitherto insignificant deity from Kyushu by the name of Hachiman became the divine protector of Tōdaiji's Great Buddha and was thereby propelled into the highest echelons of the native shrine deities. This was clearly due to the personal efforts of Emperor Shōmu, who was also the single main force behind the Great Buddha project. This article readdresses Hachiman's unprecedented divine career by focusing on Shōmu's visions of Hachiman and the changes of these visions in the post-Shōmu era. I propose two major reasons for Hachiman's success: 1) Hachiman's relative independence from the existing network of aristocratic ancestor deities, which turned him into an impartial outsider unaffected by the complicated politico-religious machinations at court; and 2) Shōmu's attempt to establish a politico-religious stronghold in Kyushu independent from the local government, the Dazaifu. In this context, Hachiman's famous oracular ability is explained as a result of Shōmu's interests rather than as a reason for them. I further argue that Hachiman's oracles probably lost importance after the Dōkyō incident of 769, which must have meant a serious crisis for Hachiman's cult in general. Wake no Kiyomaro, who unveiled Hachiman's fraudulent oracles regarding Dōkyō, was probably also a key figure in Hachiman's resurrection in the late eighth century. All in all I argue that Hachiman's enduring importance is best explained by his Bodhisattva-like features, which took shape in the course of these events and singled him out among the other *kami*.

**Keywords:** State Buddhism, ancestor cult, oracle, Tōdaiji, Usa, Dazaifu, Great Buddha, Fujiwara no Nakamaro, Dōkyō, Wake no Kiyomaro

Research on Hachiman 八幡, one of the most popular Shinto deities (*kami*) in Japan, is not yet very well established in Western Japanese Studies. One important essay, to which most subsequent Western research including this article is greatly indebted, was written by Ross Bender in 1979.<sup>1</sup> A few years later, in 1985, the art historian Christine Guth Kanda wrote a

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<sup>1</sup> The article summarizes Bender's dissertation on Hachiman, finished in 1980. The dissertation, however, has been published only on the internet (<http://rossbender.org/japan.html>). Bender has continued to work on the Nara period, when Hachiman emerged to national prominence, but has turned away from religious topics.

pioneering monograph on Hachiman art. The research of the 1980s was not followed up on, however, perhaps owing to the confusing mix of native, Chinese, Korean, and—last but not least—Buddhist aspects of Hachiman. Some of these aspects have been addressed in articles by Allan Grapard, but a detailed historical analysis of Hachiman’s unprecedented “career” is still missing in Western scholarship on Japan.<sup>2</sup>

Japanese research on Hachiman is dominated by the work of Nakano Hatayoshi 中野 幡能 (1916–2002) who devoted virtually his whole scholarly life to this topic.<sup>3</sup> In particular, Nakano is to be credited for tracing many legendary aspects of Hachiman to specific beliefs and practices in Kyushu from where Hachiman originated. In recent years, however, critics such as Iinuma Kenji 飯沼賢司 have pointed out that Nakano’s reconstruction of early Hachiman cults presupposes the location of the ancient kingdom of Yamatai in Kyushu, a theory that has lost plausibility. As will be explained below, several aspects of Hachiman that Nakano found in prehistorical Kyushu, such as Hachiman’s identification with Emperor Ōjin 応神天皇, are now better explained as “invented traditions” of the Nara or early Heian periods. In addition, Nakano who is clearly influenced by postwar folklore studies tends to deemphasize the political significance of Hachiman, according to Iinuma.<sup>4</sup> Largely in line with such criticism, Hasebe Masashi 長谷部将司 has presented a new analysis of the fragmentary historical records concerning Hachiman’s rise to national prominence.<sup>5</sup> My own reconstruction largely follows Hasebe’s approach.

In order to facilitate the discussion, I propose to analyze the “cult” of Hachiman as a religious phenomenon *sui generis*, without attributing it either to Shinto or to Buddhism. Japanese authors call this phenomenon *Hachiman shinkō* 八幡信仰, a very practical term, which may be translated as “Hachiman veneration.” In order to stress the unique features of this phenomenon, however, I would like to coin the term “Hachimanism.” Let me clarify here that I understand Hachimanism not as a well defined religious confession or school, but as a multitude of practices and beliefs focusing on Hachiman, which allows the coexistence of different concepts of this deity both on a chronological and a spatial axis. Nevertheless, like other *shinkō* as well, Hachimanism gained its identity and consistency from certain religious centers that exerted decisive influences on its long term development. For the later Nara period, which is the focus of this essay, these centers can be identified as the Usa shrine temple complex (Usa Jingūji 宇佐神宮寺) in Kyushu and the Tōdaiji 東大寺 in Nara.

2 Grapard’s Hachiman-related essays are mainly concerned with Kyushu and include local cults at Usa and the Kunisaki peninsula (Grapard 1986), Usa ritual and a critique on Guth’s art-historian approach (Grapard 1994), and notes on the fourteenth century *Takusenshū* (Grapard 2003, see note 6).

3 *Hachiman shinkō no kenkyū*, Nakano’s opus magnum of more than 900 pages, was first published in 1967. In 1975 an enlarged edition appeared in two volumes, which added a new introduction, three chapters and an index at the end, but otherwise did not change the contents of 1967. Subsequently Nakano published studies on select topics from *Hachiman shinkō* as well as several large collections of source materials on Hachiman and Usa. In 2002, *Hachiman shinkō jiten*, a collection of essays of a more general, introductory nature was published under Nakano’s editorship.

4 Iinuma 2004, pp. 215–17.

5 Hasebe 2010. I would like to thank Ross Bender for pointing out this article to me.

## 1. Hachiman as a Yamato Supporter in Northern Kyushu

A history of Hachimanism must begin with the fact that, notwithstanding his later importance, this deity cannot be found in either of Japan's earliest mytho-historical chronicles, the *Kojiki* (712) and *Nihon shoki* (720). This indicates that in the early eighth century Hachiman cannot have been more than a deity of limited regional importance. Hachiman's homeland Kyushu, however, was not just any region by that time. Threats from Korea, uprisings of local ethnic groups, and last but not least the devastating plague of 735–737 turned it into one of the most politically vulnerable regions of the emerging ancient empire of Japan. At that time, Kyushu was the traditional point of entrance to the empire of Japan and in many aspects a trendsetter for the rest of the country, at least in the seventh and eighth centuries. It is in this context that a deity called Hachiman becomes apparent. In 720, the *hayato* 隼人, a “barbarian” tribe in the south of Kyushu, killed a local governor according to the *Shoku Nihongi*.<sup>6</sup> While details about the government's reactions are missing from the official chronicle, the *engi* literature related to Hachiman—the various Hachiman shrine chronicles (*engi* 縁起) from later times—contains stories about a large military campaign against the *hayato*, which was ultimately led to success by Hachiman's divine intervention.<sup>7</sup> This first reported military action becomes an essential part of the Hachiman standard narrative.

Hachiman's military role may be rooted in actual belligerent ritualism by priests who created the nucleus of this deity's cult. The *Shoku Nihongi* mentions Hachiman for the first time as one of three shrine deities in Kyushu that received rewards from the imperial court for their support against the Korean archenemy, the kingdom of Silla in 737.<sup>8</sup> In 740, Hachiman is mentioned again in the context of a military enterprise led by the central government, this time the quelling of Fujiwara Hirotsugu's rebellion.<sup>9</sup> These early reports indicate that Hachiman's cultic center in Usa, in the province of Buzen 豊前, had become a spiritual and military stronghold of the Yamato court.

According to the *Shoku Nihongi*, 740 was also the year when Nara's most energetic emperor, Shōmu 聖武 (“Holy Warrior”; r. 724–749) received a divine message from the Kyushu deity.<sup>10</sup> As Hasebe Masashi has shown, however, the decisive turning point for the Shōmu-Hachiman relationship seems to be the year 746, when Shōmu attributed his recovery

6 SN 8, Yōrō 4 (720)/2/2, SNKBT 13, pp. 66–67; cf. Bender 1979, p. 131. The *Shoku Nihongi* 続日本紀, completed in 797, is the second of Six National Histories (*Rikkokushi* 六国史) by the ancient imperial court. It consists of 40 volumes spanning the years 697 to 791. It is organized in a strictly chronological order based on official administrative documents, and in this sense is regarded as a most reliable historical document.

7 Two sources are particularly important in this group of texts: 1) *Usa Hachimangū Mirokuji konryū engi* 宇佐八幡宮弥勒寺建立縁起 (also known as *Konryū engi* or *Jōwa engi*), reportedly compiled in 844, although this early dating is sometimes doubted; 2) *Hachiman Usagū gotakusenshū* 八幡宇佐宮御託宣集 (also known as *Takusenshū*), 1313 by the Usa monk Jin'un 神吽, a compilation of earlier fragmentary sources. Many of these sources were lost in 1184 during the Genpei War when Usa served temporarily as a stronghold of the Taira.

8 SN 12, Tenpyō 9 (737)/4/1; SNKBT 13, pp. 312–13. The other shrines were Tsukushi Sumiyoshi 筑紫住吉 and Kashiigū 香椎宮 (dedicated to Jingū Kōgō), both well attested in the *Nihon shoki*. Besides the Kyushu shrines, Ise and Ōmiwa also received rewards through imperial messengers at the same occasion.

9 The rebellion of Fujiwara Hirotsugu 藤原広嗣 (–740), an ousted member of the court nobility, was based in the local government (Dazaifu 大宰府) of Kyushu and could only be subdued by what was the largest military campaign of the eighth century. The reasons for his protest seem to lie partly in the rivalry within the newly formed four houses of the Fujiwara, partly with the general decline of the Fujiwara due to the deaths of the four heads of these houses in the wake of the mentioned epidemic in 737. This affair seems to have led to a distance between Shōmu and his maternal Fujiwara relatives. For details, see Piggott 1997, pp. 253–54, among others.

10 SN 17, *senmyō* 15, cited below, p. 37.

from an illness to Hachiman, and rewarded the deity with special ranks and estates.<sup>11</sup> This year also marks the end of Shōmu's "wandering period," which consisted of several attempts to transfer the capital and/or to find a suitable place for his project of constructing a monumental Buddha.<sup>12</sup> Thus, Shōmu seems to have established a special relationship with Hachiman, when he reorganized his court in the capital of Heijōkyō 平城京 (Nara) after a decade of political turmoil and crisis. As I attempt to demonstrate below, Shōmu's vision of Hachiman was probably the basis for the deity's rise to national prominence. Therefore, the central questions of this essay are: 1) What kind of deity did Shōmu see in Hachiman; 2) what kind of benefits did he hope for; and 3) to what extent was this vision shared or modified by his environment and his successors?

## 2. Hachiman and Shōmu

Nakano Hatayoshi argues quite convincingly that the name of Hachiman (or Yahata in the probable original reading) can be traced back to a prehistorical place name in Kyushu.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, it is very well possible that the existence of a *deity* by this name is not much older than its first mention in the *Shoku Nihongi*. All *engi* chronicles state quite explicitly that from early on three different families practiced the worship of what eventually became known as Hachiman. Besides the Usa 宇佐, who were probably early chieftains of the region by this name and are briefly mentioned in the *Nihon shoki*,<sup>14</sup> we find another family by the name of Karajima 辛嶋 with strong ties to the Korean peninsula, as well as a family by the name of Ōga 大神 (or Ōmiwa) who we are, according to Nakano, relatives of the important priestly lineage of Ōmiwa in Yamato written with the same characters (大神, "great deity"). In other words, Hachiman cannot be seen as the ancestor deity (*ujigami* 氏神) of one specific *uji* lineage, as was usual for most other early shrine deities. Moreover, his main place of worship seems to have shifted between various locations before settling in today's Usa Jingū 宇佐神宮, where Hachiman was worshiped together with Miroku Bosatsu 弥勒菩薩 in one of Japan's first "shrine temple complexes" (*jingūji* 神宮寺). Thus, already in Kyushu, Buddhism also played an important role in the establishment of Hachiman. In this sense, Hachiman can be regarded as a hybrid, supra local deity, uniting different regional interests and religious aspects.<sup>15</sup>

Besides the military aspect of Hachiman mentioned before, the mobility and inter-nationality of Hachiman's cult in Kyushu is certainly a factor explaining why Hachiman became part of Shōmu's great legacy, the construction of the Great Buddha (*daibutsu*) in Nara's Tōdaiji. The biggest bronze statue of the ancient Buddhist world, an image of

11 Hasebe 2010, p. 46. Hasebe refers to an official report by a shrine priest from Usa of 821, which states that Hachiman received the "third rank" (*san'i* 三位) and 400 farm households. By contrast, Hachiman had received only twenty households in 740, after the Hirotsugu rebellion (see below).

12 Augustine 2012, in particular pp. 71–77.

13 While the Chinese characters 八幡 convey the meaning of "eight banners," Nakano tends to read *yahata* (or *yawata*) as "eight fields" (八畑). For a summary of Nakano's theories on this point, see Nakano 1967, pp. 918–21, and Bender 1979, p. 129.

14 *Nihon shoki*, Aston 1972, vol. I, p. 112. According to this report, Jinmu, the founder of the imperial lineage, arranged a marriage between an Usa princess and a certain Amanotane, here reported as an ancestor of the Nakatomi (i.e. the Fujiwara).

15 This view is supported by Nakano's analysis of the complex ritual relations between Usa and other shrines in the former province of Buzen (Nakano 2002b; see also Law 1994).

Rushana Nyorai, marked the center of a network of provincial Buddhist temples (*kokubunji* 国分寺) that was also designed by Shōmu.<sup>16</sup> The Great Buddha can be seen as the embodiment of Shōmu's ambition to govern the country on the basis of Buddhist doctrine. But why, then, did he need the *kami*, and why did he choose a local deity from Kyushu to protect a Buddhist icon that was itself regarded as protector of the state?

In fact, Shōmu's Buddhism never excluded the native *kami* and native ancestor cults. We should keep in mind that, parallel to the establishment of the *kokubunji* network and other reforms directed towards Buddhism, Shōmu took on the status of a "manifest deity" (*akitsukami* 現神) much more explicitly than any emperor before. In the words of Joan Piggott, this emperor was a "multiple charismatic personae—sage ruler, heaven's descendent, manifest *kami*, and Servant of the Buddha."<sup>17</sup> Shōmu's inclusivist religious worldview came to the fore most vividly in the year 749, when the casting of the statue and its gilding were finally completed. Incidentally, this was also the year when Shōmu, at the apex of his power but also troubled by sickness, stepped aside to pass the throne on to his daughter Princess Abe 阿倍.<sup>18</sup> This was an unprecedented maneuver of imperial succession. Finally, 749 was the year when Hachiman made his first appearance in Nara.<sup>19</sup>

## 2.1. Hachiman and the *Daibutsu* Project, 749

In the context of Shōmu's *daibutsu* project, the specific importance of the *kami* in general and Hachiman in particular can be clearly detected from edicts issued in 749. Imperial edicts (*senmyō* 宣命) were usually read aloud in front of a large audience of courtiers and commoners in the name of the emperor. Whenever a *senmyō* is cited in the *Shoku Nihongi*, this indicates that the related event was one of utmost importance.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, *senmyō* were not simply boring official speeches. On the contrary, in the otherwise terse style of the chronicle, they constituted a narrative genre of their own, which reveals some background information (however fabricated) on the motivations behind the reported facts. While we have to take these *senmyō* as carefully tailored and censored sources of information, they clearly reveal history as it was intended to be understood by subjects of the Nara rulers. Thus, as far as such edicts refer to Hachiman, they can be regarded as the foundation, or in a sense the myth of origin, of his cult in the capital.

The first edicts relevant for the history of Hachiman and the *daibutsu* were related to the discovery of gold in northern Japan in the second month of 749. This discovery ensured the gilding and thus the completion of the Great Buddha. At this occasion, Shōmu ordered the proclamation of two edicts in his name. The first (*senmyō* 12) was a short expression of gratitude directed to the still unfinished statue itself and contains the famous self-

16 Buddha Vairocana, later commonly known as Dainichi in Japan.

17 Piggott 1997, p. 238.

18 Abe (718–770) is the famous "last empress" of Japanese antiquity who ruled twice, first as Kōken Tennō 孝謙天皇 (749–758) and later as Shōtoku Tennō 称徳天皇 (764–770). For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to her as Abe or Empress Abe.

19 The events of this year are analyzed in Bender 2012, on which the following section is based.

20 Japanese historiography has identified and numbered the *senmyō*, which are usually in Japanese in contrast to the standard Chinese of the chronicle. Herbert Zachert (1908–79) devoted a lifetime to the translation of the *senmyō* from *Shoku Nihongi* into German. Two editions of his translations appeared in 1932 and 1950 respectively.

designation of Shōmu as “servant of the Three Jewels” (i.e. Buddhism). The second (*senmyō* 13) explains and justifies the whole *daibutsu* project in some detail:

[... Since] the words of the Buddha are superior among all laws in protecting the nation, We placed the Sutra of the Victorious Kings<sup>21</sup> in all the provinces under heaven which We govern, and said that We would construct an image of Rushana Buddha.<sup>22</sup> There upon We prayed to the *kami* of heaven and earth, and to the divine *tennō* who founded the reign in the distant ages past [...]. But many people were doubtful of success, and We ourselves were anxious that there would not be enough gold. Then We received the divine revelation of the Three Jewels, and the *kami* of heaven and earth together vouchsafed particularly good fortune, and also the imperial spirits (*sumeraga mitamatachi* 天皇御霊多知) granted their blessing, and they cherished Us with particular affection, and made [the gold] appear.<sup>23</sup>

In this edict, Shōmu not only recounts the creation of the Great Buddha but outlines his entire politico-religious program:

Buddhism is the essential tool for protecting the state (= the emperor).

In order to promote Buddhism, Shōmu ordered the construction of temples everywhere in the country and of the Great Buddha.

In order to realize these projects, Shōmu prayed to all *kami*, and in particular to the spirits of former emperors.

Thus, Shōmu appeals also to non-Buddhist divine forces in order to realize state Buddhism. Eventually both Buddhas and *kami* indeed grant their help, according to the edict. “Divine revelation of the Three Jewels” seems to be a key term in this context, since it contains allusions to both Buddhas and *kami*.<sup>24</sup> It may even be an allusion to an oracle by Hachiman, as I will show below. While the edict does not mention Hachiman directly, it soon becomes evident that he was already a major player among Shōmu’s divine aids. Later in the same year, on the nineteenth day of the eleventh month,<sup>25</sup> Hachiman himself announces his coming to the capital.<sup>26</sup> This was the first seemingly spontaneous act of speaking (*takusen* 託宣) in *Shoku Nihongi*, for which Hachiman became famous.<sup>27</sup> Hachiman’s “visit” was in fact a one month procession from Kyushu to Nara, led by the Usa priestess Ōga no Morime 大神杜女 and

21 *Saishōōkyō* 最勝王經, otherwise known as *Konkōmyōkyō* or Sutra of the Golden Light, one of the “three sutras of state protection”; here it is used as *pars pro toto* for the provincial temples (*kokubunji*) that were meant to store copies of the sutra.

22 Buddha Vairocana, also known as Dainichi, here the Great Buddha.

23 *Senmyō* 13, SN 17, Tenpyō Shōbō 1 (749)/4/1; SNKBT 14, pp. 64–69. Zachert 1932, pp. 184–85. My translation follows Bender 2012, p. 9, with small modifications.

24 *Sanbō no sugurete ayashiki ōmikoto no shirushi* 三宝乃勝神祇大御言驗 (SNKBT 14, pp. 66–67). *Sanbō* 三宝, the “Three Jewels” (Skt. *triratna*), are used as a synonym of the Buddha or Buddhism here. *Ayashi* (“miraculous”), on the other hand, is written somewhat unusually with the character 神 (*kami*). While the phrase clearly points to a verbal revelation, I am not convinced by Joan Piggott’s interpretation of it as a “miraculous mantra” (Piggott 1997, p. 276).

25 Translated into the Western calendar system, this event happened on January 1, 750. To avoid confusion, I render Tenpyō Shōbō 1 (the traditional *nengō* reference to this year) always as “749.”

26 *Yahata no ōkami takusen shite, kyō ni mukafu* 八幡大神託宣向京. SN 17, 749/11/19; SNKBT 14, pp. 94–95.

27 See below, p. 42.



her brother Ōga no Tamaro 大神田麻呂.<sup>28</sup> *Shoku Nihongi* reports among other things that highways had to be cleaned and the killing of animals was prohibited in the provinces on the way. Upon Hachiman's arrival, "a new building was constructed in the Nashihara no Miya 梨原宮 south of the palace and made a divine palace (*jingū*)."<sup>29</sup>

The highlight of these events, however, was a kind of reunion of Hachiman and the imperial family (including the now-ruling Empress Abe, her father Shōmu, and her mother Kōmyō 光明) in front of the Tōdaiji, the temple of the Great Buddha. The form in which Hachiman was present at the reunion is not quite clear. At any rate, his priestess, Morime, was carried in a "palanquin of a purple color, like that of the imperial palanquin." This unprecedented honor may have been meant for Hachiman, which would imply that Morime took a kind of "divine body" (*shintai* 神体) with her, or that she herself acted as a kind of human *shintai* of the *kami*. At the temple grounds of Tōdaiji, a huge festival took place and "five thousand Buddhist priests read sutras in praise of the Buddha." Yet, the imperial edict on this occasion was not addressed to the Great Buddha (who was officially inaugurated two years later in an even larger ceremony), but to Hachiman and Himegami who were promoted to excessively high ranks, as will be discussed in more detail below. An edict (*senmyō* 15) proclaimed by chancellor Tachibana no Moroe 橘諸兄 (684–757) in the name of Retired Emperor Shōmu (sic) relates these promotions to the *daibutsu* project as follows:

[...] In the last year of the dragon (740), We worshipped at the Chishikiji 智識寺 in the Ōgata district of Kawachi.<sup>30</sup> Because We desired to construct such an image and yet were unable to do so, We appealed to the Great Kami Hachiman of the Broad Ways who dwells in the Usa district of Buzen Province. The god proclaimed (*noritamawaku* 勅):

We, as a *kami*, will invite the *kami* of heaven and earth and will certainly accomplish [your wish]. We will turn water into steam for the casting of coppe. We will merge our body with the grass, trees and earth. It shall be done without hindrance.

Because of the proclamation of the god We were overjoyed, and We have been able to accomplish this work.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, this edict recounts a similar story as the one cited above, this time indicating the concrete names of places and deities involved. We learn that Shōmu got his inspiration to build the giant statue of Roshana Buddha (the Nara *daibutsu*) in a Buddhist temple in

28 My reading "Ōga" of the name 大神 follows Nakano, in line with most Western authors. The SNKBT edition of SN has "Ōmiwa" (SNKBT 14, p. 93).

29 SN 17, 749/12/18, SNKBT 14, pp. 94–97; tr. Bender 2012, p. 26 (modified). The exact location of the Nashihara no Miya is unknown but the place must have been close to the Second Avenue (Nijō) south of the imperial palace, according to later sources (SNKBT 14, p. 96, note 1). The Nashihara shrine is therefore not identical with the Hachiman shrine inside the Tōdaiji precincts that appears somewhat later, nor with the present Tamukeyama Hachiman shrine 手向山八幡宮, south of the Hokkedō temple hall in Nara. Nevertheless, all these places are on the same east-west axis corresponding to Nijō Avenue.

30 This refers to a report of 740 (Tenpyō 12), i.e. the troubled time after the Hirotsugu rebellion when Shōmu was in search of an alternative place for his capital (see above). See also Piggott 1997, p. 58.

31 *Senmyō* 15, SN 17, 749/12/27; SNKBT 14, pp. 96–97; tr. Bender 2012, p. 27 (modified). See also Bender 1979, pp. 135–36.



Kawachi, which was dedicated to the same Buddha. In order to realize his aims, however, Shōmu did not direct his prayers to Roshana Buddha himself but to Hachiman, who had just helped to quell the afore-mentioned Hirotsugu rebellion. Hachiman promptly revealed himself and told the emperor in poetic words that he would physically intervene in order to ensure the casting of the Great Buddha.<sup>32</sup> It seems as if all the Buddhas, *kami*, and imperial spirits that Shōmu invoked comprehensively in the earlier edict take on a concrete shape in Hachiman. At least structurally, Hachiman occupies the same position in this edict as the various numinous agencies in the edict issued eight months before. In both cases, we can see the clear intention of Shōmu not only to rely on canonical Buddhist powers, but also to make sure that native deities, including his ancestors, support the project. In this context, we may recall the famous (yet not well attested) legend of Shōmu's fundraiser Gyōki 行基 (668–749), who was sent to the imperial ancestor goddess Amaterasu in Ise to solicit her support for the *daibutsu* project.<sup>33</sup>



Figure 1. Hachiman's palanquin. Tamukeyama Hachiman shrine, Nara, 14th c.<sup>34</sup>

## 2.2. Hachiman's Ranks

Shōmu's particular favoring of Hachiman has been explained by the fact that Shōmu regarded him as his ancestor, the semi-mythical Emperor Ōjin 応神, with whom Hachiman is conventionally associated in most modern Hachiman shrines. Nakano Hatayoshi, for instance, tends to follow the *engi* literature, which identifies Ōjin and Hachiman from early on.<sup>35</sup> More recent authors like Iinuma and Hasebe, however, have raised doubts in this respect. The aforementioned high ranks, bestowed on Hachiman and his consort in front of the Great Buddha, have become an important issue in this debate.

32 Variants of this oracle became an important asset of later Hachiman lore, for instance in the "Oracles of the Three Shrines" (*sanja takusen* 三社託宣). On this topic, see Bocking 2000.

33 For an early mention in the *Nakatomi harae kunge* (12th–13th c.), see Teeuwen and van der Veere 1998, p. 41. See also Itō 2003, p. 85.

34 Used in ceremonies that reenact Hachiman's visit of the capital this palanquin is sometimes regarded as the prototype of the modern *mikoshi* (portable shrine). Important Cultural Property. Source: Grand Exhibition of Sacred Treasures from Shinto Shrines (Kyushu National Museum, Jan. 15–March 9, 2014, [http://www.kyuhaku.jp/exhibition/exhibition\\_s34.html](http://www.kyuhaku.jp/exhibition/exhibition_s34.html), last accessed April 3, 2014).

35 For a summary of Nakano's arguments, cf. Nakano 2002a, pp. 47–50.

While shrine-ranking became a standard procedure in later times, it seems to have been a novelty in the Nara period. In addition, both Hachiman deities received so-called *hon* 品 ranks, of which four grades existed. Hachiman was promoted to first rank (*ippon* 一品), Himegami to second. These ranks were Japanese additions to the Tang Code, the model of ancient Japan's legal system, designed for members of the imperial family only. In other words, this ranking implied the inclusion of the Hachiman deities into the imperial family. A similar conclusion can be drawn in the case of the purple (i.e. imperial) palanquin mentioned earlier. While this seems to sustain Nakano's claim that Hachiman was already regarded as Emperor Ōjin, Hasebe points out that the *tennō* himself had no rank since he was in a position above the ranking system. The *hon* ranks, therefore, qualified the deities as belonging to the status of princes and princesses (*shinnō* 親王), below the emperor. Thus, Hasebe turns the question of ranking into an argument against the assumption that Hachiman was already identified as an emperor at that time. He further substantiates the interpretation of Hachiman as an imperial prince through the fact that Hachiman and Himegami (or their respective shrines in Usa) were given estates and farming households of an amount that corresponded exactly to their respective princely status: 800 households on eighty *chō* of rice fields for Hachiman (first rank), and 600 households on sixty *chō* for Himegami (second rank).<sup>36</sup>

In any event, the rankings and their implications reveal that Hachiman and Himegami were indeed imagined as members of the imperial family. It is therefore only logical that their "servants," i.e. the priestess Morime and her brother Tamaro of the Ōga family, were also promoted to comparatively high ranks (junior four and junior five) of the court nobility, which immediately turned them into the highest ranking shrine priests in the country.<sup>37</sup> In fact, the *Shoku Nihongi* already mentioned Morime and Yakeme 宅女, another priestess from the Ōga family, a year earlier. According to an entry from 748/8/17, both priestesses were promoted by an extraordinary leap of three ranks to grade junior five/lower, which was comparable to a provincial governor and put them in the *tenjōbito* 殿上人 class (allowing them to enter the imperial palace).<sup>38</sup> In addition, they were awarded the aristocratic *kabane* 姓 title of Asomi 朝臣. If we take this report at face value, it indicates that preparations for their visit to the capital had started at least one year in advance. Incidentally, Yakeme was obviously replaced by Morime's younger brother Tamaro but, all in all, female priestesses seem to have dominated the Usa sanctuary at the time. Further, Morime was referred to as *negini* 禰宜尼 or "priestess and [Buddhist] nun."

### 2.3. Temporary Decline under Fujiwara Nakamaro, 752–764

As we have seen, the marvelous rise of Hachiman and Himegami to a position as the most cherished deities of the court was probably owing to Shōmu's personal predilection. This is confirmed by the fact that Hachiman's influence waned when Shōmu stepped back from power in 749. As is commonly known, the political situation of the 750s was marked by severe tensions arising from Shōmu having installed his unmarried daughter Abe as succes-

36 Hasebe 2010, p. 46. According to this formula, Hachiman might have been promoted to third rank already in 746, when he received four-hundred households on twenty *chō* (ibid.). For the newly built *kokubunji*, ten *chō* were standard at the time (Piggott 1997, p. 256).

37 Even the most high-ranking priests in Ise did not proceed beyond rank five at the time (Bender 1979, p. 136, after Nakano 1967, p. 112).

38 SN 17, Tenpyō 20 (748)/8/17; SNKBT 17, pp. 58–59.

39 In this situation, the rising strongman of the Fujiwara lineage, Fujiwara Nakamaro 藤原仲麻呂 (706–764) won the support of Shōmū's queen-consort Kōmyō 光明 (701–760, herself born a Fujiwara). Kōmyō and Nakamaro were probably the real power holders, especially when Shōmū eventually died in 756. This led to the abdication of Abe in 758, in favor of the “Fujiwara puppet” Junnin Tennō 淳仁天皇 (r. 758–764). Eventually, however, Abe and her supporters defeated and killed Fujiwara Nakamaro after the so-called Nakamaro Rebellion of 764, forcing Junnin to abdicate. They restored imperial dignity to Abe, who resumed it under the name of Shōroku Tennō. The period between 752 and 764, however, was marked by the growing political influence of Nakamaro's Fujiwara branch (the Southern House, *nanke* 南家) at the cost of the Tachibana and other noble families who had held power under Shōmū.

Nakamaro's rise seemed to exert a tremendously negative impact on the infant stage of Hachimanism. This impact, however, can only be read between the lines of Hachiman-related reports in the *Shoku Nihongi*. First, in 754 Hachiman priests Morime and Tamaro were accused of employing sorcery against the government and, consequently, downgraded and exiled.<sup>40</sup> In the following year, Hachiman commanded through an oracle that all the estates of 1,400 households, which he had received in 750 should be restored to the court.<sup>41</sup> This must have implied a severe economic setback for Usa. In order to explain why Usa Hachiman himself should have demanded such a thing, we have to assume severe pressure from the Dazaifu, the regional government of Kyushu, which was at that time directed by the younger brother of Nakamaro, Fujiwara no Otomaro 藤原乙麻呂 (–760).<sup>42</sup>

Ironically, the same Otomaro had received his post in 750 following an oracle from Usa, which commanded that Otomaro be promoted to junior third rank and made head of the Dazaifu.<sup>43</sup> Such high promotions were usually issued in the name of the emperor only, and thus clearly violated the realm of ceremonial procedures at court.<sup>44</sup> In hindsight, these measures appear as unsuccessful efforts to draw Otomaro into the Hachiman camp. Consequently, after the death of Shōmū in 756, Hachiman disappeared from the *Shoku Nihongi* and remained silent until the second accession to the throne by Empress Abe in 764.

### 3. Hachimanism under the Abe/Dōkyō Regime, 764–770

After Empress Abe defeated Nakamaro and resumed her position with much more authority than before, Hachiman not only reappeared in the official chronicle, but also regained his economic supply.<sup>45</sup> While we do not know what happened to his former priestess

39 See above, note 18.

40 SN 19, Tenpyō Shōbō 6 (754)/11/24; SNKBT 14, pp. 150–51.

41 SN 19, Tenpyō Shōbō 7 (755)/3/28; SNKBT 14, pp. 152–53. The number includes also the households given to Himegami.

42 Located in the province of Chikuzen, close to the modern city of Fukuoka, the Dazaifu was installed in the late seventh century, after Japan's great naval defeat in the Battle of Baekgang, 663. Besides governing Kyushu, the Dazaifu's main function was the control of the harbor of Hakata, Japan's only international entrance gate in the Nara period. It was in command of a small army of *sakimori* (frontier guards), who initially were recruits from Northern Japan (Batten 2007, pp. 358–61).

43 SN 18, Tenpyō Shōbō 2 (750)/10/1; SNKBT 14, pp. 106–107.

44 Hasebe 2010, p. 50.

45 SN 25, Tenpyō Hōji 8 (764)/9/29 mentions 25 *chō* of dry land for Hachiman (SNKBT 15, pp. 38–39). Two years later Usa seems to have regained all estates given in 750. While the *Shoku Nihongi* mentions only 600 households for Himegami (SN 27, Tenpyō Jingo 2 [766]/10/2; SNKBT 15, pp. 116–17), it is hard to conceive that Hachiman should not have received his 800 at that time as well (Hasebe 2010, p. 51).

Morime, her brother, Ōga no Tamaro, was pardoned in 766 and regained his court ranks as well as a position as the governor of Bungo (south of Buzen where Usa is located). In other words, the status quo of Usa under Shōmu was more or less reestablished by Abe during her second reign.

This sets the scene for Hachiman's ambivalent role in the well known Dōkyō 道鏡 incident. The rise and fall of this Rasputinian Buddhist monk, who became the most important advisor of Empress Abe, has been the topic of many previous studies.<sup>46</sup> Let me, therefore, recall only briefly the most important events of 769, when Dōkyō (700–772) had advanced to the head of the Council of State (*dajōdaijin zenji* 太政大臣禪師), a feat that no Buddhist monk had ever achieved or was to achieve again. Dōkyō's ambitions, however, were not yet satisfied. According to the *Shoku Nihongi*, a certain priest from the Dazaifu, Nakatomi no Asomaro, "fabricated a pronouncement of Hachiman, which said: 'Let Dōkyō be made emperor and there shall be a great peace in the realm'."<sup>47</sup> In this case, even the Empress harbored doubts concerning Hachiman's oracle and requested a confirmation from Usa. To that end, she selected Wake no Kiyomaro 和気清麻呂 (733–799), the younger brother of a trusted lady in waiting, as an emissary. Kiyomaro returned from Kyushu with Hachiman's most famous decree:

Since the beginnings of our country, lord and subject have been fixed. Never was a subject made lord. Establish the heavenly sun succession within the imperial lineage. Sweep unjust persons swiftly away.<sup>48</sup>

In later times, these words would be cited time and again to consolidate the dogma of imperial succession in a single bloodline. Kiyomaro's message may indeed have wrecked Dōkyō's plans, but did not lead to his immediate downfall. This had unfortunate consequences for Kiyomaro, who was sent into exile barely escaping execution. When the empress died shortly thereafter, however, Dōkyō was also exiled, and a new branch of the Fujiwara took over business at court. As Herman Ooms has recently analyzed in detail, this also spelled the end of the so-called Tenmu dynasty from Emperor Tenmu 天武天皇 (631–686) via his great grandson Shōmu to Empress Abe.<sup>49</sup> The exiled Kiyomaro, on the other hand, reappeared soon after Dōkyō's fall, obviously favored by the latter's erstwhile enemies. He eventually advanced to a position as one of the most trusted members of the new regime led by Kanmu Tennō 桓武天皇 (737–806), and became one of the architects of the relocation of the capital to Heiankyō 平安京.

Later exegetes from antiquity to the present celebrate both Kiyomaro and Hachiman as paragons of loyalty to the throne for their opposition to Dōkyō and as the saviors of the imperial lineage. From this perspective, it makes sense to explain Hachiman's Bodhisattva title and identification with Emperor Ōjin as a kind of "reward" for his anti-Dōkyō oracle. Both attributions had become apparent in the early Heian period at the very latest. However, official reports reveal that Hachiman was again shrouded in silence after the Dōkyō incident. It is much more probable, therefore, that the contradictory messages from Usa raised serious doubts regarding Hachiman's oracles. Moreover, Hachiman was clearly a creation of Shōmu whose dynasty was replaced by another branch of the imperial family, the descendants of

<sup>46</sup> See, for instance, Bender 1979.

<sup>47</sup> Bender 1979, p. 142.

<sup>48</sup> SN 30, Jingo Keiun 3 (769)/9/25; SNKBT 15, pp. 254–57; Bender 1979, p. 125.

<sup>49</sup> Ooms 2008, especially, ch. 8, "Plottings." See also Toby 1985.

Emperor Tenji 天智, who were backed up by different factions at court. This shift of power seems to have been one reason for the subsequent transfer of the capital under Kanmu.<sup>50</sup> While this probably did not mean a complete setback for Buddhism, as earlier authors often maintained, it did mean an end to Shōmu's Buddhocratic policies of which Hachiman was certainly a part. Thus, it would have been no surprise if the Hachiman boom of the Nara period had ended here as abruptly as it had begun. The fact that this did not happen indicates that Hachimanism had taken on an indispensable function in late Nara society.

#### 4. Hachiman's Oracles

As Bender has pointed out, "in the Nara period Hachiman spoke, while the Sun Goddess was silent. This distinctive oracular function helps to explain the attention lavished on Hachiman by the early Nara court."<sup>51</sup> But is it plausible that Hachiman was the only deity of the eighth century to give oracles? And if so, why? In fact, the word "oracle" (*takusen*) is mentioned only three times in the *Shoku Nihongi*, yet always in relation to Hachiman. In some other cases, the term *kyō* 教 ("advice") is used for Hachiman's proclamations. Altogether, the *Shoku Nihongi* contains six separate reports of Hachiman revealing his divine will in the form of an oracle.<sup>52</sup> Whether this really substantiates Bender's claim needs to be explored through a closer examination of Japanese oracular practices in general.

If we look for similar divine revelations in the first official chronicle, the *Nihon shoki*, two famous examples come to mind. The first is the encounter between the Yamato-based deity Ōmononushi 大物主 and the mythical Emperor Sujin 崇神 (officially counted as Japan's 10th emperor) in the wake of a devastating plague, which was poised to eliminate the entire populace. When Sujin desperately appealed to the (unknown) gods who had sent the epidemic, a *kami* by the name of Ōmononushi revealed himself in a dream and explained that a new form of ritual including a separate shrine and a separate priestly lineage were necessary to appease him. This led to the foundation of the Ōmiwa shrine and indeed put an end to the calamities.<sup>53</sup>

The second famous example is a divine revelation addressing the semi-historical Emperor Chūai 仲哀 (14th emperor), who happened to be on a military campaign in Kyushu. In this case, a deity spoke through the mouth of his queen-consort, Jingū Kōgō, demanding the emperor direct his campaign against the Korean kingdoms. When Chūai ignored the oracle, he soon died, while the invasion of the peninsula was successfully carried out by Jingū.<sup>54</sup>

Less spectacular reports of divine speech include an oracle (*taku* 託) by the old ancestor deity Izanagi who was worshipped on the island of Awaji. In the year Richū 履中 5 (404, according to *Nihon shoki* chronology), he revealed through the mouth of a local priest (*hafuri* 祝): "I cannot endure the stench of blood." This oracle terminated the branding of horse

50 Toby 1985.

51 Bender 1980, p. 30.

52 For surveys of the original texts cited in this section, I used an online edition of the Six Imperial Chronicles (*Rikkokushi*) based on the *Shintei zōho Kokushi taikai* 新訂増補国史大系 edition published between 1929 and 1964 by Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, provided by Arayama Keiichi 荒山慶一 at <http://www.j-texts.com/sheet/rikkoku.html> (last accessed: April 3, 2014).

53 NSh, Sujin 5; Aston 1972, vol. I, pp. 151–53. The *Kojiki* contains a shorter version.

54 NSh, Chūai 2; Aston 1972, vol. I, pp. 221–23. According to the *Kojiki* version of this story, Amaterasu and the Sumiyoshi deities reveal themselves through the empress.

keepers on the island.<sup>55</sup> There were similar reports from other places as well but there were no particular shrines or deities that practiced divination significantly more often than others. The only hint at some kind of specialization pointed to the imperial court.<sup>56</sup> All in all, the *Nihon shoki* conveyed the impression that rulers as well as priests and even commoners were receptive to divine messages.

Comparing *Nihon shoki* and *Shoku Nihongi*, it is indeed striking that in the latter chronicle Hachiman was the only *kami* to communicate oracles. While this certainly does not mean that other *kami* ceased to reveal themselves, it points to a privileged position of Usa in that respect. This may be related to new divinatory techniques imported from the continent. Also, the term *takusen*, which does not appear in *Nihon shoki*, hints at a new kind of specialization. In addition, the Usa oracles in the *Shoku Nihongi* differed from divine revelations in the *Nihon shoki* also in terms of content. Hachiman gave advice of a more general, political nature. In this respect, his revelations bore similarities with the divine advice to attack Korea, as received by queen-consort Jingū. By contrast, older examples from the central regions were related to divine wrath, and underscored the fearful nature (*aramitama*) of the *kami*.<sup>57</sup> The political pragmatism inherent in Hachiman's oracular activity points to a new relationship between ruler and *kami* under the regime of Shōmu.

At the same time, we should note that Hachiman's counsel in the post-Shōmu period usually referred to his own shrines, or to matters concerning Kyushu. It was only when Dōkyō tried to fortify his top position at court that Hachiman was drawn into the context of imperial succession. While his first oracle on this topic was, according to official historiography, a fraudulent message fabricated by a priest of the Dazaifu (i.e. a superior of the Usa priests), the second oracle was obviously only achievable through the personal effort and courage of the messenger, Wake no Kiyomaro. In this regard it is interesting to look closer at the report of Kiyomaro's mission in the third official chronicle, the *Nihon kōki*:<sup>58</sup>

[... Kiyomaro] went to the [Usa] shrine (*jingū* 神宮) and received an oracle. Kiyomaro however prayed: "This advice by the Great God is most important for our country (*kokka*). The oracle is hard to believe. Please, show me a miracle (*shin'i* 神異)!" Thereupon, the *kami* revealed himself in visible form. He was three *jō* (30 feet) tall and bright as the full moon. Kiyomaro almost lost consciousness (*shōkon* 消魂), fell down, and was not able to look at him. Then the *kami* offered an oracle: ...<sup>59</sup>

55 NSh, Richū 5; Aston 1972, vol. I, p. 307.

56 The head (*baku* 伯) of the Department of Divine Affairs is commanded to "take counsel of the Gods. Accordingly, the priests (*hafuri* 祝) by divine inspiration, answered: [...]" NSh, Kinmei 16 (555)/2; Aston 1972, vol. II, pp. 76–77.

57 *Aramitama* are the "rough spirits" that embody wrath and punishment by the *kami* in contrast to their "gentle spirits" (*nigimitama*), i.e. their benevolent state of mind. Even in the case of Ise, there exists Aramatsuri no Miya 荒祭宮, a branch shrine for the *aramitama* of Amaterasu. Incidentally, ominous oracles led to frequent relocations of shrines at Ise in the late Nara period (Naumann 1988, p. 221).

58 The *Nihon kōki* 日本後紀 is the sequel to the *Shoku Nihongi*. Completed in 840, it covers the years 792–833. As in other chronicles of the Six National Histories, the biographies of important persons are sometimes summarized in a kind of obituary at the report of their deaths. In Wake no Kiyomaro's case, the obituary in the *Nihon kōki* is unusually long and detailed, as if it had been taken wholesale from another source. It has also been published separately as *Wake no Kiyomaro den* 和氣清麻呂伝. For a (rather dubious) discussion and a (rather useful) translation of this text into German, see Bohner 1940.

59 NK8, Enryaku 8 (799)/2/21. Hachiman's oracle in this text conveyed the same message but is much longer than the *Shoku Nihongi* version and criticizes Dōkyō explicitly (see Bender 1979, p. 143).



According to this later source, Kiyomaro first received a confirmation of the pro-Dōkyō oracle, which he refused to believe. In order to learn the real intentions of Hachiman, Kiyomaro resorted to the (old-fashioned?) means of personal communication with the deity and finally heard what loyal supporters of the imperial lineage (the anti-Dōkyō camp) expected. We should note that in this scenario, the personal experience of a middle-ranking courtier was given more credibility than the divine message produced by professional priests. Thus, the *Nihon kōki* cast serious doubts on the divinatory apparatus at Usa.<sup>60</sup> At the same time, Hachiman himself was separated from the oracles issued in his name.

While the chronicles, including the *Nihon kōki*, are silent on what was going on in Kyushu in the aftermath of the Dōkyō incident, there exists an administrative report (*gejō* 解状) by a certain member of the Ōga family, which is contained in the “Orders of the State Council” (*daijō kanpu* 太政官符) of Kōnin 2 (821).<sup>61</sup> This report includes not only valuable information on the priestly lineages at Usa, but has been identified as one of the earliest sources of Hachiman’s *engi* literature. According to this document, Wake no Kiyomaro became governor of Buzen (including the Usa district) in Hōki 2 (771), and installed Ōga no Tamaro (who had been pardoned under Abe/Dōkyō) as the head priest (*daigūji* 大宮司) at Usa. Thereby he established the Ōga as the leading priestly lineage. The same events were recorded in much more detail in the *Takusenshū* 託宣集, which was compiled in 1313. Based on these sources it becomes evident that Kiyomaro undertook a substantial reform at Usa, which stipulated among other things that all oracles be placed under the control of diviners (*urabe*) of the Dazaifu. In other words, Kiyomaro did not put a complete end to the divinatory practices at Usa, but made sure that priests from a governmental institution would hold Usa oracles in check.<sup>62</sup>

From this time forward, Hachiman’s shrine temple at Usa showed up sporadically at the level of official chronicles but received no particular attention. The *Nihon kōki*, for instance, recounted that in 794 a certain monk Dentō Daihōshi 伝燈大法師 was sent to Kyushu to read sutras at Usa and two other local shrines (Aso 阿蘇 and Munakata 宗形).<sup>63</sup> In the same vein, Hachiman was mentioned for the first time by his Bodhisattva title in 809: “Head priests (*gūji* 宮司) were installed for the *kami* of Kehi in Echizen and for Hachiman Daibosatsu 八幡大菩薩 in Buzen.”<sup>64</sup> Apart from this unusual title, which is only mentioned in passing, it appears as if Usa was not any different from other important shrines at the periphery of the realm. While divination was certainly carried on there, it did not produce spectacular results that made it into the official chronicles. This suggests that Hachiman’s oracular functions were probably a factor in his initial rise, but did not maintain their prominence after the Dōkyō incident. By the end of the ninth century, when the Mirokuji

60 It is interesting to see how this episode was turned into a pro-Usa and anti-Kiyomaro pronouncement in the much later *Takusenshū*. Cf. Grapard 2003, p. 86.

61 The document by a certain Ōga no Ason Kiyomaro 大神朝臣清麿, *kannushi* priest at Usa of the Senior Eighth Rank/Lower, has been edited and discussed in Hasebe 2010, pp. 44ff.

62 This is in line with the priestly structures at court as they become evident in the somewhat later *Engishiki* (926). According to this text, diviners (*urabe* 卜部) from different parts of the country including Kyushu formed the lowest ranks of the Department of Divine Affairs (Jingikan 神祇官). One of their tasks was the control of oracles and divinations reported by the Yin-Yang Bureau (Onmyō-ryō). See Scheid 2001, pp. 68–69.

63 NK 2, Enryaku 13 (794)/3/3. Dentō Daihōshi is otherwise known as Gyōkyō 行教, founder of Iwashimizu Hachimangū in 859. That this monk should have been sent to Usa as early as 794 is, however, hard to believe.

64 NK 17, Taidō 4 (809)/2/21. The *Nihon kōki* contains a similar report on Usa from 804, referring to priestly promotions at Usa, the Kashima shrine 鹿嶋神社 in Hitachi, the Kehi shrine 氣比神社 in Echizen, and the Keta shrine 氣多神社 in Noto.



(the Buddhist part of the Usa temple shrine complex) came to dominate *kami* affairs in Usa, women seem to have been expelled from the divinatory process.<sup>65</sup> This must have further weakened the original oracular tradition.

### 5. Hachiman as Imperial Bodhisattva

From the aforementioned, we can infer that the Hachiman frenzy among the elites calmed down in the late eighth century, but that Usa remained an influential regional shrine. Thus, there seems no need to regard “Hachimanism” as an exceptional religious phenomenon. Yet, we can observe an increase in attention to Hachiman in Buddhist sources. From the hagiography of Saichō 最澄 (767–822), we know that this influential Buddhist reformer read sutras at Usa in gratitude for his safe journey to China in 804.<sup>66</sup> Kūkai 空海 (774–835), the other great religious reformer under the regime of Kanmu and his successors, is frequently credited as the creator of “Hachiman in Buddhist garb,” which implies that he created an iconography of the deity that prevailed during the Heian and Kamakura periods.<sup>67</sup> Even more importantly, Hachiman was installed as a protecting deity at several ancient temples in Nara (Yakushiji 薬師寺, Daianji 大安寺) and Heiankyō (Tōji 東寺, by Kūkai) following the example of the Tōdaiji. And finally a new shrine temple was created in Iwashimizu in the south of Heiankyō around 860, that would soon outstrip the old sanctuary at Usa. As I have argued in more detail elsewhere, these developments indicate a growing interest in Hachiman on the part of Buddhist monks who seem to replace the court as the driving force behind the spread of Hachimanism.<sup>68</sup> This, I argue, is directly related to the combination of Bodhisattva title and imperial pedigree, which turned Hachiman into an ideal mediator between the Buddhist clergy and the court.



Figure 2. Hachiman in Buddhist garb.<sup>69</sup>

The general acceptance of Hachiman as a) Bodhisattva and b) manifestation of Ōjin Tennō could not have been possible without influential lobbying. The key suspect is surely Wake no Kiyomaro. After reorganizing Hachiman’s sanctuary at Usa, Kiyomaro assisted Kanmu Tennō in the transfer of the capital to Nagaokakyō 長岡京 (784) and later to Heiankyō (794). In the course of these activities, Kiyomaro sponsored the creation of two Buddhist temples in the new capital region: Jinganji 神願寺, Temple of Divine Oath, and Jingoji 神護寺, Temple of Divine Protection (also known as Takaosanji 高雄山寺).<sup>70</sup> The

<sup>65</sup> Grapard 2003, p. 87, based on Nakano Hatayoshi; personal communication between Grapard and Nakano.

<sup>66</sup> *Eizan daishi den* 叡山大師伝, cf. Groner 2000, p. 89.

<sup>67</sup> The *locus classicus* for this attribution is an entry in the *Tōbōki* 東宝記 (a chronicle of the Tōji temple by Gohō 果宝, 1352), translated quite differently in Guth Kanda 1985, p. 54, and Bogel 2009, p. 270.

<sup>68</sup> Scheid 2014.

<sup>69</sup> Hachiman as a monk (Sōgyō Hachiman 僧形八幡), Yasumigaoka Hachimangū, Yakushiji, Nara. Late 9th century; painted wood sculpture; height: 33.9 cm; national treasure. (Reproduced from Konno 2004, p. 14.) The figure probably held a string of prayer beads (*juzu* 数珠) in the left.

<sup>70</sup> Hasebe 2010, pp. 58–59.

application of the term *jin* (divine, *kami*) in both cases refers to Hachiman. Eventually, both institutions fused into the Jingoji at Mt. Takao that is protected by the Hiraoka Hachiman shrine 平岡八幡宮. Since both Saichō and Kūkai served at this temple for some time, it is possible that they first came into contact with Hachiman at this religious site. The abandoned Jinganji, on the other hand, was originally built in the south of Nagaokakyō at Otokoyama, the site that some fifty years later became the Iwashimizu Hachiman shrine 石清水八幡宮. Thus, Kiyomaro's two temples clearly bore a strong connection with Hachiman. It is therefore quite plausible that the figure of Kiyomaro was the link between Hachimanism under Shōmu and Hachimanism in the early Heian period at Iwashimizu. I hope to demonstrate this in more detail in my future work on Hachiman.

## 6. Conclusions

According to Iinuma Kenji, Hachiman expert Nakano Hatayoshi was challenged to go deeper into the history of Hachiman in Kyushu, when his teacher, the eminent scholar Miyaji Naokazu 宮地直一 (1886–1949) interpreted Hachiman as a *hayarigami* 流行神, i.e. a spontaneous, irrational religious mass phenomenon of the Nara period.<sup>71</sup> Judging from the abrupt ups and downs of Hachimanism mirrored in the *Shoku Nihongi*, it is indeed tempting to regard the Nara enthusiasm for Hachiman as a reflection of social unrest similar to the *hayarigami* phenomenon of the late Edo period. Millennial movements of this kind indeed existed already in the seventh century, as evidenced by the appearance of a strange silkworm deity in 644 (one year before the Taika *coup d'état*), which Michael Como has pointed out recently.<sup>72</sup> It is therefore quite tempting to regard Hachiman as another phenomenon of this kind. At the same time, we have to acknowledge that Nara Hachimanism was an elite phenomenon.<sup>73</sup> All excesses of ritual magnification notwithstanding, we can surmise quite rational political motivations behind Shōmu's choice of Hachiman. As has been argued by Hasebe Masashi among others, Shōmu aimed to strengthen the position of the *tennō* by creating equidistance with all the leading families at court. If this is correct, it would be quite logical that Shōmu sought divine support from a *kami* that was not associated with one of the powerful clans. Conversely, this would also explain why the Fujiwara, or at least the leading branches of that family, seem to have opposed the rise of Hachiman under Shōmu and his daughter Abe. Hachiman therefore represents a *kami* that supported Shōmu and his Buddhocratic policies at the cost of lineage privileges represented by the canonical *kami* of the *Kiki* myths.

A second, yet related, political incitement concerns the power balance in Kyushu. The upgrading of Usa priests to a status comparable to provincial governors suggests that Shōmu planned to strengthen the shrine's independence from the Dazaifu, establishing it as a source of authority under his immediate control. Again, the Fujiwara, who seem to have monopolized the Dazaifu at the time, emerged on the opposing side. Shōmu probably

71 Iinuma 2004, p. 215. Miyaji's analysis of Hachiman is published in Miyaji 1956.

72 NSh, Kōgyoku 3 (644)/7; Aston 1972, vol. II, pp. 188–89; Como 2009, pp. 143–44.

73 After all, even the *Nihon ryōiki* 日本靈異記 from the early ninth century, which depicts Shōmu's reign as a kind of golden age, contains only one mention of the "Great Yahata Shrine-Temple" 矢羽田大神寺 in Usa (NR III/19, SNKBT 30, p. 156), but does not report anything on Hachiman's oracles or on his relationship with Shōmu and Dōkyō.

attempted to bypass the Fujiwara by establishing direct links to the divinatory apparatus at Usa, which he used to back up his own decisions. Once these links were established, however, they were also used by people like Fujiwara no Nakamaro and finally by Dōkyō, until they partly lost their efficacy. If this supposition is correct, this could further imply that the relations between Hachiman and the Great Buddha went in two directions. Not only did Hachiman support the *daibutsu* project (perhaps through access to metallurgical knowledge as has been assumed at times), but the *daibutsu* also enhanced the prestige of Hachiman and his oracles in Usa. Hachiman may have been brought to Nara not because his oracles were so effective, but in order to make his oracles effective on a national scale.

In the course of these processes, which certainly did not develop according to one concise master plan, Hachiman took on other characteristics that singled him out in the *kami* pantheon and made him attractive for Nara society. In this respect, we should look once more at Hachiman's revelation to Shōmu, quoted in the edict of 750:

We, as a *kami*, will invite the *kami* of heaven and earth and will certainly accomplish [your wish]. We will turn water into steam for the casting of copper. We will merge our body with the grass, trees and earth. It shall be done without hindrance.

This oracle does not have much in common with the commands or curses by *kami* that we know from oracular speech in the *Kiki* and other early sources. Rather, it bears similarities to the vows of Bodhisattvas and Indian *deva* deities in canonical Buddhist texts. Hachiman is presented here as an empathic deity who dedicates all his efforts to the common good. There is no *aramitama* aspect, no indication in other words that Hachiman had the capacity to turn his blessings into incomprehensible acts of destruction (as with “traditional” *kami* like the above mentioned Ōmononushi).<sup>74</sup> His divine charisma was probably modeled on Buddhist guardians like Bishamonten 毘沙門天, who figures prominently in the Sutra of the Golden Light. Here Bishamonten proposes a kind of deal to any human king who protects Buddhism and venerates the Sutra: divine protection (including military campaigns) in exchange of material support of monks and nuns.<sup>75</sup> Like Bishamonten, Hachiman is a protector of the emperor-cum-state (*kokka*), and, or rather *because*, he leads all people to the teachings of the Buddha. In other words, Hachiman was not simply given a Buddhist title at some point, but was first and foremost conceived of as an empathic Bodhisattva-like deity, who acted according to moral principles. As such, he was different from the deities in older mythological narratives who exhibited their “rough” and “gentle” aspects of *aramitama* and *nigimitama* according to unfathomable rules. Hachiman was therefore the first *kami* to embody a vision of transcendental justice, a late notion in the history of religions, as Jan Assmann has pointed out.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>74</sup> See above, note 55.

<sup>75</sup> Bishamonten is the Japanese equivalent of Vaiśravaṇa in Sanskrit. Prominent as the guardian of the North and leader of the Four Guardians of Heaven (Shitennō), Bishamonten is the main protagonist in the Golden Light Sutra's “Chapter on Four Great Kings.” His numerous vows accord to the following example: “... we the four great kings [...] will perpetually protect, give refuge, guide [...] and ensure peace and happiness of the kings of humans who listens to, venerates and worships [...] the *Sublime Golden Light [Sutra]*” (Dawa 2006, p. 33).

<sup>76</sup> Assmann 1999.

In my view, the pioneering role of a Bodhisattva-like savior who emerged from indigenous traditions was already present in Shōmu's edict. In this role, Shōmu may have envisioned Hachiman's efforts as a spiritual double of his own devotion to Buddhism. Hasebe even maintains that Hachiman was first identified as Shōmu, and only later as Ōjin.<sup>77</sup> Although this evolutionary sketch is perhaps a little too straightforward, both Shōmu and Hachiman seem to have been shrouded in a similar spiritual aura in the eyes of Nara era Japanese. In any event, the empathic and salvific aspects that Hachiman assumed under Shōmu's regime were surely more important for his long lasting career than his oracular or military functions. It was his literal identification with a Bodhisattva that saved Hachiman from falling back into oblivion after the failure of the overtly political instrumentalization of his oracles.

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<sup>77</sup> Hasebe 2010, pp. 52–53.

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